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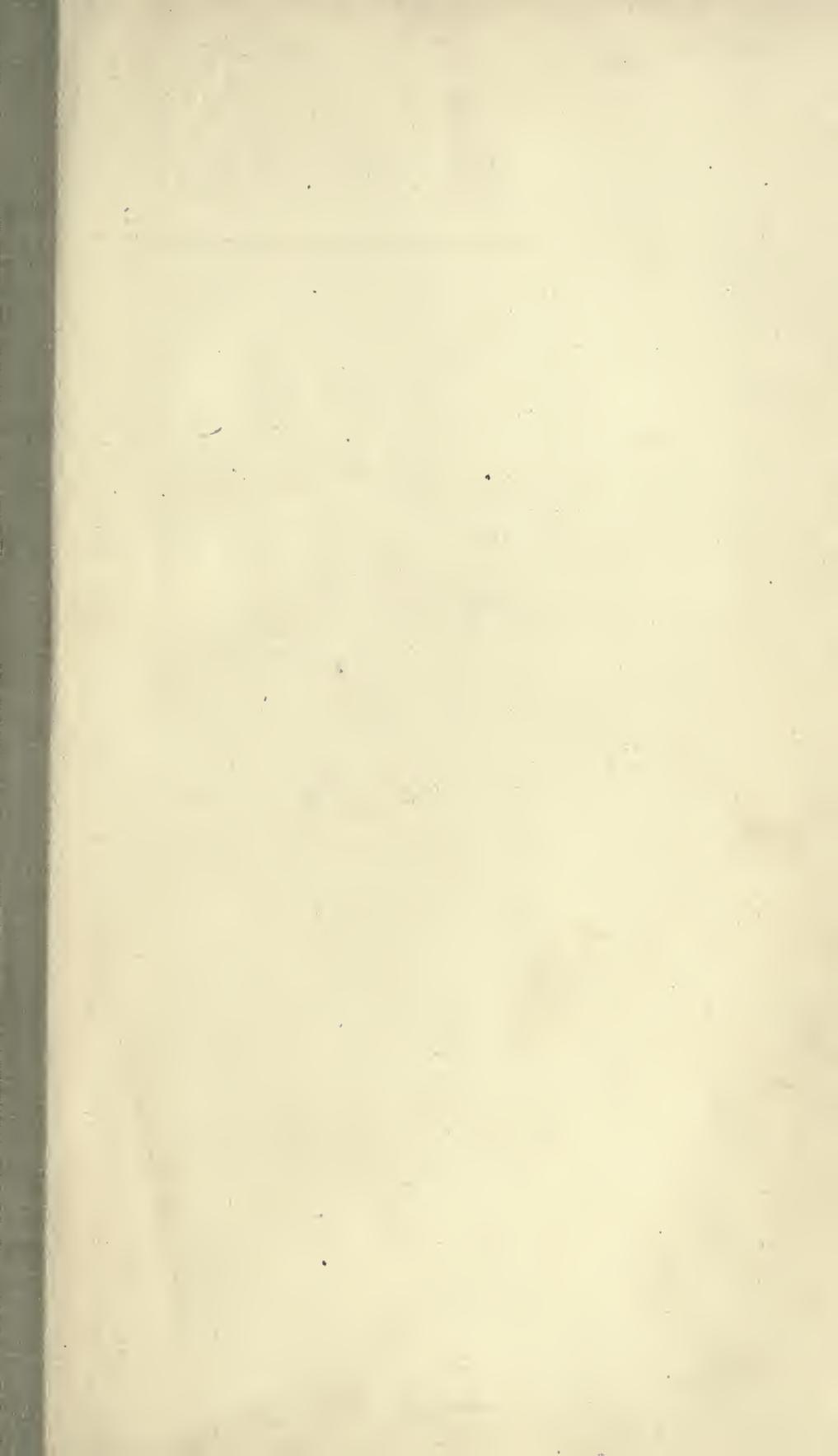
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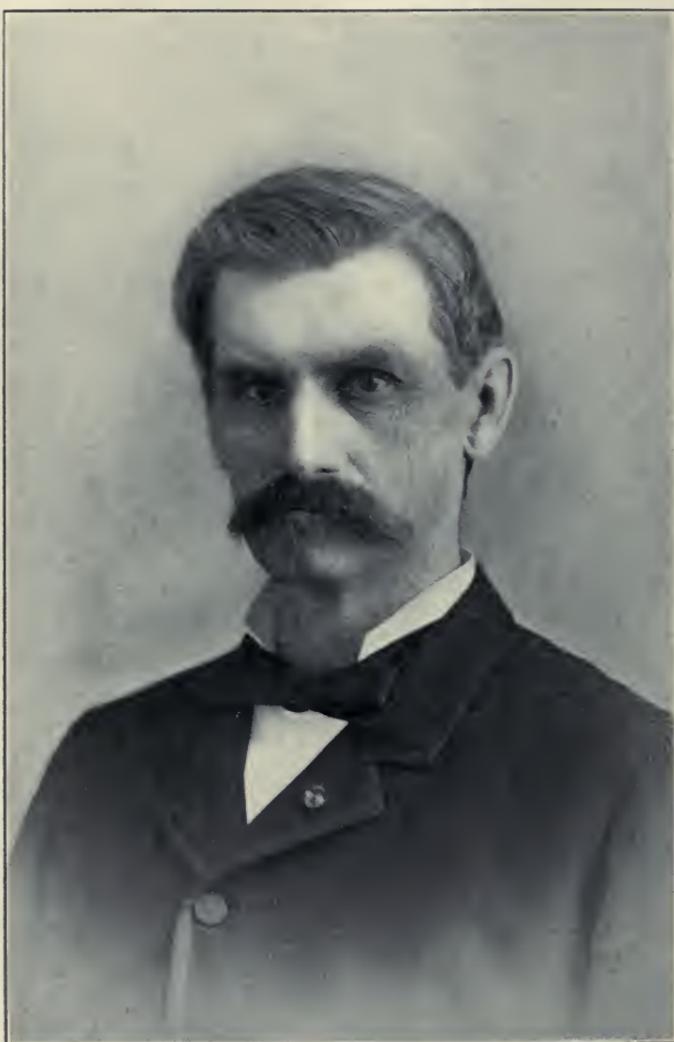
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MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY,
VOL. X. PLATE XI.

HISTORY OF THE ST. PAUL & SIOUX CITY RAIL- ROAD, 1864-1881.*

BY GEN. JUDSON W. BISHOP.

MINNESOTA VALLEY RAILROAD COMPANY.

The Minnesota Valley Railroad Company was organized in 1864 under an act of the Minnesota Legislature approved March 4th, 1864, which act granted to that company all the "lands, interests, rights, powers and privileges" granted to the then Territory of Minnesota by and under the so-called Land Grant Act of Congress approved March 3rd, 1857, and which were conferred on the then so-called Southern Minnesota Railroad Company by act of the Legislature approved May 22nd, 1857, pertaining to the proposed line of railroad from St. Paul *via* Mankato and other points named to the southern boundary of the state in the direction of the mouth of the Big Sioux river, where Sioux City now is.

The said act of March 3rd, 1857, had granted to the state six sections of land per mile of the railroad as a bonus for its construction; and a subsequent act of Congress approved May 12th, 1864, granted four additional sections per mile which were duly transferred to the Minnesota Valley Railroad Company by act of Legislature approved March 2nd, 1865.

The Minnesota Valley Railroad Company was organized with an authorized capital stock of \$500,000, of which \$473,000 was at once subscribed and paid in.

Its principal stockholders and first Board of Directors were: H. H. Sibley, Russell Blakeley, R. H. Hawthorne, George Cul-

*Read at the monthly meeting of the Executive Council, April 13. 1903.

ver, W. F. Davidson, E. F. Drake, H. M. Rice, J. L. Merriam, Horace Thompson, Franklin Steele, John S. Prince, J. E. Thompson, J. C. Burbank, T. A. Harrison, John Farrington, W. D. Washburn, and C. H. Bigelow. Of these seventeen directors, only the last three named now survive.

The officers of the company were: E. F. Drake, president; J. L. Merriam, vice-president; G. A. Hamilton, secretary; and Horace Thompson, treasurer. These gentlemen continued in their respective offices until the merging of the St. Paul and Sioux City and its subsidiary lines, with the West Wisconsin, St. Paul, Stillwater and Taylor's Falls, and North Wisconsin lines, into the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway Company in 1880.

In 1865 the road was located and constructed from Mendota to Shakopee, 22 miles; and in 1866 it was extended eastward from Mendota to West St. Paul, 6 miles, terminating at South Wabasha street, near where a freight yard and depot were re-established last year (in 1902), and was extended westward from Shakopee to Belle Plaine, 19 miles, making then, in all, 47 miles of completed road.

About the first of April, 1867, the writer was appointed chief engineer, and under his supervision the location and construction of successive extensions were completed to Le Sueur in 1867, to Mankato in 1868, to Lake Crystal in 1869, and to St. James, 122 miles from St. Paul, in 1870.

Meantime, in 1869, the Minnesota Valley Railroad Company and the Minnesota Central Railroad Company (since absorbed by the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Company) joined in the construction of the bridge over the Mississippi river, and of the line from Pickerel lake (two miles east of Mendota) to and over said bridge and to the site of the present Union Depot in St. Paul; our company building a freight house, 40 by 300 feet, on the river bank at the foot of Robert street, so arranged on the river side as to exchange freight with steamboats, there being then no direct railway connection at St. Paul for the east or south.

ST. PAUL AND SIOUX CITY RAILROAD COMPANY.

On the 7th day of April, 1869, the name of the company was changed from the *Minnesota Valley Railroad Company* to

the *St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad Company*, the road in that year having run out of the valley at the south bend of the river, and having reached the open prairie at Lake Crystal on its way towards Sioux City.

The new company had \$2,400,000 of capital stock, and fifteen directors: Messrs. H. H. Sibley, Horace Thompson, S. F. Hersey, George A. Hamilton, J. L. Merriam, W. F. Davidson, J. C. Burbank, J. S. Prince, E. F. Drake, A. H. Wilder, C. H. Bigelow, T. A. Harrison, Russell Blakeley, H. G. Harrison, and J. W. Pence; of whom Mr. Bigelow is now the only survivor.

Mr. John F. Lincoln had been appointed superintendent of the line in 1867, and continued as such until 1880.

IMPORTANCE OF THE MINNESOTA RIVER.

The Minnesota river in those days was a factor not to be disregarded by the railroad:

First, Because it was navigable and therefore a competitor for April, May, June, and July, as far up as Mankato, and a part of the time to Fort Ridgely and the Redwood and Yellow Medicine Indian agencies.

During the spring and summer of 1867, the terminus of the road being at Belle Plaine, we arranged with the steamer "Mollie Mohler" to make a round trip daily, leaving Belle Plaine on arrival of our morning train from St. Paul, to Mankato and return, to connect with our afternoon train to St. Paul. Other and larger boats made frequent trips whenever they could find a paying load, and at that time the railroad wanted and needed all the business the country afforded.

Second, The river was accustomed in the spring and summer months to overflow its banks and cover the bottom lands one or two miles wide, and five to fifteen feet deep, compelling us for safe construction to keep our railroad line above high water level, and to follow generally the contour of the bluffs.

At that time all that part of the state south and west of Mankato tributary to the Minnesota river was in grass, uncultivated and uninhabited except by the few settlers along and near the river banks. Some twelve or more counties were

drained by the Maple, the Cottonwood, the Redwood, the Parle rivers, all, with flowing into the Minnesota

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operation through to Sioux City, using the Iowa Falls and Sioux City track between Lemars and Sioux City, as is in fact now done (1903).

The counties in southwestern Minnesota and northwestern Iowa, near and tributary to the new road, were by this time sparsely occupied by new comers, unaccustomed to the new life and situation; and, apprehending a repetition of the previous winter's experience, every effort was made to prepare and provide for it on the part of the Railroad Company, and to induce and stimulate such preparation on the part of the settlers, by accumulating fuel and supplies during the fall months.

On the 13th of November the winter commenced with a furious snowstorm with high wind, which lasted two or three days. The weather was extremely cold, and the snow particles were hard and fine like sand, and it was impossible for man or beast to make headway against it. It blinded the eyes, cut the skin like a shower of needles, confused the mind, and smothered the breath; and, if the man who was overtaken by it did not immediately find shelter, he was likely to perish miserably in a very short time. This was the "blizzard" which, in its several murderous visits during that winter, cost the lives of nearly a hundred victims in different parts of this state. The winter all through was even more severe than the preceding one, and the road was again for several months operated, so far as was possible, at a heavy loss to the company.

On the first of January, 1873, the writer was appointed general manager by both companies interested in the line between St. Paul and Sioux City, Capt. Thomas P. Gere (who had been assistant engineer) succeeding him as chief engineer of both companies; and the authority of John F. Lincoln as superintendent was extended over both roads making the through line.

During the spring and summer of 1873 thorough preparations for the coming winter were made by the sloping out and obliterating of the shallow cuts so that snow would not lodge in them, and by constructing double lines of snow fences and planting trees to protect the deeper cuts, and generally bringing the new track into better condition. These efforts proved successful, and there has been little trouble in operating the road in any winter since then, except in the unusually severe one of 1880-1881.

It has been said already that the country between Mankato and Sioux City, a stretch of nearly two hundred miles, was in 1871 and 1872, when the road was under construction, a naked prairie, almost as destitute of trees as of human inhabitants. As during those and the following years the lands were being taken and occupied by actual settlers, the company by precept and by example tried to encourage the planting of trees; and, for ten years, young trees, cuttings, and tree seeds were transported to every station free of charge. The beneficent results of this policy are now apparent to one who sees the splendid groves surrounding the comfortable farm houses and shading the parks and streets in the villages and cities, and who remembers the utterly blank landscape of thirty years ago.

THE GRASSHOPPER SCOURGE.

The new settlers had generally done in the previous summer months more or less breaking up of the virgin sod, and everywhere along and in the vicinity of the roads were fields of corn, wheat, and other grain, giving promise of a plentiful harvest, the first crop of the pioneers generally in their new homes. One August day the sky was filled with a cloud of grasshoppers coming from unknown regions of the Northwest, full grown and hungry. They alighted in myriads on every field of grain, and in an hour the ground was bare. After completing the devastation of the growing crops, they filled the ground with eggs and then departed, whither no one knew.

It is hard now to appreciate the situation, and to realize the consternation that pervaded the inhabitants and those interested in the Railroad Company, as every hope of a crop of any kind for that season disappeared, while the gravest apprehensions remained as to that of the coming year. Generally, however, the ground was fall plowed in preparation for the next spring sowing, and with the vague hope that the eggs might be destroyed by the winter frosts.

In early June of 1874 the fields that had been devastated by the grasshoppers in the previous summer had been generally cultivated and re-seeded and were promising a generous return to the anxious owners. But now the eggs were hatching,

and in a few days the little hoppers outnumbered the wheat plants five to one. A few more days and the fields were eaten bare again. Whole counties in southwestern Minnesota and northwestern Iowa were in this condition, and a panic ensued at once. I spent a day in personal inspection of the devastated fields and in interviewing the demoralized settlers, and, returning that night to St. Paul, reported the situation next morning to our Directors at a special meeting. The outlook was very discouraging, but it would become a great deal worse if something were not done at once to check the impending stampede of the disheartened settlers, and to restore and establish confidence.

I suggested a plan, and it was adopted, and the next day I was at the front again, putting it into operation.

I had proposed to join with five others in the purchase from the company, at its regular published prices, of all the railroad lands in two townships located in the heart of the grasshopper district, and to immediately commence breaking the sod, employing the settlers to do the work in small tracts. Messrs. Horace Thompson, A. H. Wilder, and John L. Merriam, of St. Paul, and Adrian Iselin and George I. Seney, of New York, who were consulted and who approved by telegraph, formed, with myself, the party who were facetiously dubbed the "Grasshopper Syndicate."

The lands were selected near Sheldon, Iowa, and I telegraphed to John L. Kenny, who had been quartermaster in my regiment ten years before, and who knew how to manage men and teams, to meet me there next morning.

While he proceeded to mark off a square mile of land into twenty acre tracts, I "intercepted" the migrating settlers as they came in sight on their way to Dakota, or to anywhere beyond the grasshoppers, and before night I had captured twelve of them, each with a contract to break twenty acres at \$2.50 per acre. The wagon bed was lifted off, and the wife and children commenced housekeeping in it, while the man unlimbered his breaking plow and started in. The news spread over the country like a prairie fire in November, and within six weeks I had over 2,000 acres turned over. A good many of these men, after completing their contracts, returned to their abandoned homesteads and broke twenty acres or more each for themselves.

Then came the fall plowing, and the panic gradually quieted down. Meantime the hoppers had devoured the crops, had grown to maturity, filled the ground with eggs again, and departed. Now evidently there was more trouble to come. With 2,000 acres of newly broken land to be utilized, we built a farm house with barn, sheds, granary, etc. Next spring it was all put into crops, including corn, oats, flax, barley, etc., and one square mile field in wheat.

About the first of June the growing grain was something to be proud of as we looked it over, but a close inspection revealed the ground alive with 'hoppers again. I would not weary this audience with any more grasshopper war stories, but we have recently heard that they filled the ground with eggs last fall in certain northwestern counties of the state, and our experience may be helpful to those interested there.

I telegraphed to St. Paul for barrels of coal tar, and for plates of sheet iron about eight feet long by four feet wide, and we undertook to save that square mile of wheat in this way. The sheet iron plates were bent up a little at the front edge, and at the rear edge a strip was turned up six or eight inches wide. These plates were laid along the south line of the field at the southeast corner, with a space of eight or nine feet between them, end to end. A horse was placed in front of, and between, each pair of plates, his whiffletree being attached by wires about nine feet long to the nearest corners of the two plates behind him, so that, when ready to advance, the "line of battle," as the boys called it, extended about as many rods as there were plates. Then the plates were brushed with coal tar, and the line advanced northward. The 'hoppers in front of the horse would jump to the right and left, and another and final jump would land them in the tar. At first a man was required to manage each horse, but as they became used to the work, their heads were connected by lines, so that a man at each end and one to spare, could guide a line of eight or nine horses, and could clean about sixteen acres at every trip across the field. Each pan would accumulate a load of several bushels of 'hoppers in crossing the field, and at the end of the trip the pans were cleaned with shovels, rebrushed with tar, readjusted in line, and a return trip was made in like manner over the adjacent ground.

Though all this did not work smoothly and perfectly at first, it did after a few hours' practice, and we thus covered the entire square mile in five days.

The next week we went over the ground in like manner from east to west, and found that we had effectually cleaned up the little pests without appreciable injury to the growing grain; and then our other fields were treated in like manner. These operations were watched with great interest by neighboring farmers, and many of them saved their crops by similar efforts.

A week later a new danger threatened this particular field. A quarter section cornering on it had been sown also to wheat, and had been abandoned by the owner to the 'hoppers hatched therein. They had eaten it bare, and now, being half grown, had begun to migrate over to our field. They were not old enough to fly, and traveled in short leaps, and there were millions of them, all hungry.

Fortunately they were discovered when the movement commenced, and it was met by commencing a ditch at the corner and extending it as rapidly as possible to the north and east. We found that a ditch two feet wide, and one and a half feet deep, was sufficient to stop them; very few were able to cross it—the grand army went into it, and were utterly unable to rise out of it. In a couple of days they had nearly filled it, and the raid was over.

A good many fields were abandoned to the pests that summer, to be totally destroyed, but some were saved, to yield a fair harvest. Our square mile of wheat gave us 11,298 bushels, which was sold at 80 cents; the total expense of fighting the 'hoppers was between 30 and 40 cents per acre.

This year (1875) the grasshoppers at maturity generally left the country without depositing eggs, and there has been no serious trouble with them since. Those appearing in later years were less in numbers, easily handled, and created no panic.

The "Grasshopper Syndicate," however, continued its operations, breaking up new land every year, and selling out both new and cultivated lands, as buyers appeared, carrying on meantime its farming operations on a large scale, until in 1882

it was closed out, returning to each man all the capital he had invested, with interest and a handsome dividend of profits. It had deserved and achieved success.

Its example was followed by other large non-resident land owners, several of whom placed their lands under the writer's management for similar treatment. So, besides the 13,000 acres owned by the Syndicate, of which about one-half was put under cultivation, two farm headquarters, with buildings, etc., being successively established, he had to look after other similar enterprises, establishing three other farms and cultivating about 4,000 acres. All of these were successfully carried through until disposed of to the satisfaction and profit of the owners, and incidentally to the benefit of the road at a critical time in its history. Of course, as a railroad manager he could give but casual personal attention to these farms; but, with capable and honest foremen in charge, and with a system of reports and accounts, he was able to keep them under such supervision as was necessary without neglecting the regular railroad work.

EXTENSION OF THIS RAILWAY SYSTEM.

There were financial troubles in 1873, 1874 and 1875, and there was a disposition to unfriendly legislation in Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin during those years, apparently growing out of the so-called granger movement among the farmers; and for these reasons not a mile of railroad was built in Minnesota during the three years last named.

In 1876 the Worthington and Sioux Falls Railroad Company was organized by the St. Paul and Sioux City people, and the road was built from Sioux Falls Junction to Luverne in that year. It was extended to Beaver Creek in 1877 and to Sioux Falls in 1878, being the first railroad to reach that city.

In 1879 the branch road was built from Luverne to Doon, Iowa, 28 miles; the Pipestone branch was built from Heron Lake to Woodstock, 44 miles (later extended to Pipestone, 11 miles); and the Blue Earth City branch, from Lake Crystal to Blue Earth City, 34 miles, which was continued in 1880 to Elmore at the Iowa state line, 10 miles. With these, the St. Paul,

Stillwater and Taylor's Falls railroad, 28 miles, the Hudson and River Falls railroad, 12 miles, and the Omaha and Northern Nebraska railroad, 63 miles, were all merged into the St. Paul and Sioux City system, making now nearly 700 miles of connected railroad, including the extensions, completed in 1880, of the Sioux Falls road to Salem, South Dakota, 39 miles, of the Omaha and Northern Nebraska road from Oakland to Sioux City, 66 miles, and the Sioux City and Ponca road, 29 miles, a narrow gauge road which was purchased in 1879 and rebuilt in 1880.

In 1879 the St. Paul and Sioux City road had outgrown its shop accommodations at Shakopee, and, accepting an offer from the city of St. Paul of an eligible tract of forty acres within the city, near the north end of the Mississippi river railroad bridge, the construction of the various buildings was commenced; and in 1880 they were fully completed and equipped with the necessary machinery and tools, and a special branch track was constructed to connect them with the main line.

The conditions arising from the various and different arrangements that had been made from time to time for the construction of the two main divisions between St. Paul and Sioux City, and of the various branches and subsidiary lines, appeared to require a general consolidation of all the lines, and general readjustment, consolidation and reissue of the stock and bonds. This was effected as above stated, in 1879, in the corporate name of the St. Paul and Sioux City Railroad Company, with the same officers and directors who had theretofore constructed and managed the properties.

This accomplished, the situation was greatly simplified, and general conditions moreover had much improved. The grasshoppers and the blizzards had passed into ancient history. The government lands had all been taken up by actual settlers, and our railroad lands were selling freely for settlement and cultivation; prosperous villages and cities were growing up rapidly, and the settlers were no longer destitute or dependent, but were in condition to give business and earnings to the road. Meantime, however, other roads were invading our territory from the east, and were compelling readjustment of rates and division of the business.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHICAGO, ST. PAUL, MINNEAPOLIS AND OMAHA RAILWAY COMPANY.

It now became apparent that a closer and a permanent connection via St. Paul with Milwaukee and Chicago, and with Lake Superior, must be had; and the suggestion was made and considered of the purchase of, or merging with, the properties then known as the West Wisconsin and North Wisconsin railroads.

Messrs. Drake, Thompson and Merriam went to New York in January, 1880, to see what might be done to this end; but the sudden death of Mr. Thompson in that city on the 27th of that month interrupted and at last wholly changed our plans. What was finally done was to sell a majority of the St. Paul and Sioux City stock to a syndicate headed by Mr. H. H. Porter, of Chicago, and composed of the principal owners of the Wisconsin properties. This was followed in the succeeding spring of 1880 by a general reorganization of all the properties under the name of the Chicago, St. Paul, Minneapolis and Omaha Railway Company, under which name the lines are now owned and operated.

In the reorganization, several of the old St. Paul and Sioux City directors retired, and were replaced by new men, Mr. Porter becoming president of the new company. The writer remained with the new organization as general manager; and Mr. E. W. Winter was appointed general superintendent, and Mr. Francis B. Clarke, general traffic manager, their authority being extended over all lines embraced therein. During the summer of 1880 the site was purchased, and the general office building (now occupied) at Fourth and Rosabel streets, St. Paul, was erected. The Prince street freight yard and depot and the Spring street yard in this city were established; terminals in Minneapolis and Omaha were acquired and equipped; and the several extensions of various lines heretofore named, and others in Nebraska, were completed.

In connection with other roads, the St. Paul Union Depot Company was organized, and the original building was erected and the yards were established. These in the past twenty years have been twice enlarged and rearranged in the effort to accom-

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